

Harford's first female judge fulfills longtime ambition

Cooper, 37, appointed by Glendening last month

By **LISA RESPERS**
SUN STAFF

It's hard to keep up with Mimi Cooper.

For the past few years, the 37-year-old Cooper has juggled her career as a Harford County prosecutor and crime prevention official with the demands of a young family. Last week, she took on a new role: that of Judge Cooper.

"It feels good," Cooper said after spending a day on the bench observing cases handled by District Court Judge Emory A. Plitt Jr., part of the training that will prepare her for full-time judicial duties. "I'm really excited."

Her appointment to the Harford County bench last month by Gov. Parris N. Glendening is the culmination of more than a decade of work by the University of Baltimore Law School alumna, who set her sights on the legal profession after working as a legal aid volun-

teer while an undergraduate.

Although she is the first woman to sit on the bench in Harford County, Cooper downplays that: "I hope people pay more attention to the fact that I am fair and compassionate," Cooper said. "I am looking forward to more diversity on the bench in the future."

Cooper already is winning praise as Harford's newest judge. "She's intelligent and she is level-headed," said Plitt, administrative judge for the District Court. "You need to be able to process a large number of cases while at the same time making sure everyone who appears before you receives due process of the law."

Growing up in Howard County, the former Mimi Raffel graduated from Atholton High School in 1980. At the University of Maryland in College Park, she majored in political science and minored in philosophy, earning her degree in 1984.

While in law school, Cooper became friends with students who would advance to varied legal positions, from prosecutors to corporate attorneys. One of those friends, Susan Hazlett, an assist-



ANDRE F. CHUNG: SUN STAFF

Pioneer: "I just love the law," said Mimi Cooper, 37, the first woman appointed to sit on the bench in Harford County.

ant state's attorney in Baltimore County, said she and others have been teasing Cooper by referring to her as "Her Honor."

"She's just such a breath of fresh air," said Hazlett, "and she is going to shake that whole legal community up."

In 1987, Cooper earned her law degree and worked as a clerk for Judge Rosalyn Blake Bell in the Court of Special Appeals. "No one who has met Mimi ever forgets her," said Bell, whom Cooper considers a mentor. "She's a winner."

While a city prosecutor, Cooper

met her husband, Troy Cooper, 34, a sergeant with the Baltimore City Police Department. The couple have three children.

Cooper said she was so thrilled to learn she had been appointed to the judgeship that she never asked how much the job pays (\$103,000 a year).

Although it took her 11 years to achieve her dream of donning a judge's robes, Cooper said it was worth the wait. "I aspired to be a judge because I really want to be a public servant," Cooper said. "I just love the law."